

# BLIND BOY FULLER

Complete Recorded Works In Chronological Order

## VOLUME 1

23 September 1935  
to 29 April 1936

**document**  
RECORDS  
DOCD-5091



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**VOLUME 1 (23 September 1935 to 29 April 1936)**

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2. I'm A Rattlesnakin' Daddy
3. I'm Climbin' On Top Of The Hill
4. Ain't It A Crying Shame?
5. Looking For My Woman
6. Rag, Mama, Rag (take 1)
7. Rag, Mama, Rag (take 2)
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17. Black And Tan
18. Keep Away From My Woman (take 1)
19. Keep Away From My Woman (take 2)
20. Babe You Got To Do Better
21. Big Bed Blues
22. Truckin' My Blues Away
23. (I Got A Woman Crazy For Me) She's Funny  
That Way
24. Cat Man Blues (take 1)



#### DOCD-5091

During the course of his five years of recording, Blind Boy Fuller produced 129 separate master titles. In addition to these, there are five reported alternative takes that were issued on 78s, and five unissued alternates from the 1935 and 1936 sessions that were recently issued on Columbia/Legacy CK 46777. While we are indeed fortunate that Fuller was recorded in such depth, what is perhaps most striking about this body of work is how little repetition it contains. With the assistance of his manager, J.B. Long, Fuller constructed a recording career that was competitive with such popular blues artists as Big Bill Broonzy, Tampa Red, and Peetie Wheatstraw while carefully avoiding the pitfalls of a successful recording formula. Though not a guitar virtuoso on a par with Gary Davis, or a vocalist with the expressive warmth of Willie McTell, Fuller was nonetheless a versatile and highly skilled player and a singer of subtle abilities. These are qualities that have kept his recordings a fresh listening experience more than fifty years after his last session.

Fuller was born Fulton Allen in Wadesboro, North Carolina on July 10, 1907. His family was not ostensibly musical, although a sister and a younger brother are known to have played the guitar. Fuller himself, although he played a little when he was younger, does not seem to have been serious about music until he was about twenty years old. Sometime in the mid 1920s his father moved the family to Rockingham, where Fulton met his future wife, Cora Mae Martin. They married in 1926, when Cora Mae was only fourteen, and it was around this time that Fulton began to experience problems with his eyes. While one source has Fuller blinded with lye-water by a girlfriend, Bruce Bastin (in his definitive study of the Piedmont tradition: **Red River Blues**) provides the information that Fuller may have suffered from ulcers behind the eyes (a condition originally caused by snow-blindness). Bastin also reproduces the physician's report for the Durham Social Security Board from August 1937 wherein the cause for Fuller's "primary eye condition" is given as "probably gonorrhoea conjunctivitis". Whatever the cause, his blindness occurred after he reached adulthood, and this seems to have made him more dependent on others for his general welfare.

In 1927, Fuller and Cora Mae moved to Winston-Salem, and in 1929 they moved again, this time to Durham. Sometime after this they relocated to Danville, Virginia for a time, but essentially they lived in Durham after 1929. There, he concentrated on music as a livelihood and with the help of the Welfare Department was granted permission by the police to perform music in a "designated place" on the streets of Durham. It was probably at such a "designated place" that Fuller ran into J.B. Long, who was at that time a free-lance scout of sorts for the American Record Corporation. Long auditioned Fuller and obtained for him a contract with ARC.

In July 1935 Fuller, Gary Davis, and Bull City Red (George Washington) traveled to New York for their first recording sessions. Davis, who was 39 at the time of the session (Fuller had just turned 28) was the senior musician in more than age and may well have been the musician for

whom Long had the greatest expectations. Bruce Bastin (in his earlier overview of east-coast blues: **Crying For the Carolines**) first pointed to Gary Davis as perhaps the primary influence on Fuller. Davis was certainly the most proficient guitarist in Durham at the time, and even if his influence was indirect, it would still have been great. Davis himself stated that he had taught Fuller and that "he would have been alright if I kept him under me long enough". Contemporary Durham bluesmen Willie Trice and Baby Tate have attested that Davis indeed taught Fuller to play in the key of A. To be fair to Fuller, though, his real genius rested not on his originality but on his ability to absorb a multitude of influences and shape them into a coherent whole. Even given the existence of Davis' later recordings (a fair portion of which are secular), it is difficult to correlate the bulk of Fuller's catalog with that of Davis.

At the July 23, 1935 session, Gary Davis was the first to record, and the two stunning blues he performed ("I'm Throwin' Up My Hands" in the key of A, and "Cross and Evil Woman Blues" in the key of E — see Document DOCD-5060) are benchmarks against which the rest of the blues of the 1935 sessions must be measured. There have been several speculations about the cause of the friction between Davis and J.B. Long at the sessions, but it probably resulted primarily from Davis' insistence on recording religious material. Long appears to have been looking for commercial blues product and, having already obtained two strong blues numbers from Davis, he would most likely have balked at Davis' determination to record sanctified songs. Davis sang no more blues at the sessions and a few years later Long failed to persuade him to record again. This left a vacuum which Fuller wasted no time filling. His three tracks from July 23 are all strong commercial blues and apparently, once he realized he was no longer in competition with Davis he relaxed considerably as he generated nine other titles over the next three days. Recording supervisor Art Satherly thought highly of Davis' guitar abilities and probably was instrumental in convincing him to accompany Fuller on several titles. The results, particularly on "Rag, Mama, Rag" where Davis' subtly driving bass lines and Red's propulsive washboard allowed Fuller to scale new heights, were breathtaking. Perhaps Satherly worked out a compromise with Davis, because on July 25, after accompanying Fuller on two titles, Davis was allowed to record four religious pieces. At that point, eleven blues titles had already been cut, so there was little risk in pacifying Davis. The next day Davis recorded nine more religious titles completing his remarkable pre-war output in a scant four days. J.B. Long's commercial instincts were borne out as none of Davis' records appears to have sold in any quantity (based on their rarity in comparison with Fuller's 78s). Fuller concluded the four day session with "Log Cabin Blues" (a remake of Blind Willie McTell's "Come On Around To My House Mama"), and one of his rarely recorded bottleneck pieces: "Homesick And Lonesome Blues". Long and ARC should have been quite satisfied with the results of these sessions as they had produced twelve blues by Fuller, eight blues by Red, and two blues and thirteen religious titles by Davis.

Ken Romanowski

**DOCD-5091**

1. <b>Baby, I Don't Have To Worry</b>	17861-1-Vo 02956	(A)	3:03
2. <b>I'm A Rattlesnakin' Daddy</b>	17862-2-Co 30078	(A)	3:05
3. <b>I'm Climbin' On Top Of The Hill</b>	17863-2-ARC 35-10-32	(A)	3:17
4. <b>Ain't It A Crying Shame?</b>	17867-1-ARC 35-10-32	(B)	3:03
5. <b>Looking For My Woman</b>	17868-1-Vo 02956	(B)	3:09
6. <b>Rag, Mama, Rag</b>	17873-1-ARC unissued	(C)	3:03
7. <b>Rag, Mama, Rag</b>	17873-2-Co 30078	(C)	3:06
8. <b>Baby, You Gotta Change Your Mind</b>	17874-1-Vo 03014	(C)	3:13
9. <b>Evil Hearted Woman</b>	17883-2-Vo 03025	(C)	3:04
10. <b>My Brownskin Sugar Plum</b>	17898-1-Vo 03025	(D)	2:59
11. <b>Somebody's Been Playing With That Thing</b>	17899-1-Vo 03014	(D)	3:15
12. <b>Log Cabin Blues</b>	17900-1-Vo 03234	(D)	3:07
13. <b>Log Cabin Blues</b>	17900-2-ARC unissued	(D)	3:17
14. <b>Homesick And Lonesome Blues</b>	17903-1-Vo 03234	(D)	3:05
15. <b>Walking My Troubles Away</b>	19130-1-Vo 03149	(E)	2:53
16. <b>Walking My Troubles Away</b>	19130-2-ARC unissued	(E)	2:54
17. <b>Black And Tan</b>	19131-1-Vo 03071	(E)	3:20
18. <b>Keep Away From My Woman</b>	19138-1-Vo 03134	(F)	2:52
19. <b>Keep Away From My Woman</b>	19138-2-ARC unissued	(F)	3:12
20. <b>Babe You Got To Do Better</b>	19139-1-Co 30079	(F)	2:58
21. <b>Big Bed Blues</b>	19140-1-ARC 6-11-71	(F)	3:01
22. <b>Truckin' My Blues Away</b>	19141-1-Co 30079	(F)	3:05
23. <b>(I Got A Woman Crazy For Me) She's     Funny That Way</b>	19142-1-Vo 03179	(F)	3:03
24. <b>Cat Man Blues</b>	19143-1-ARC unissued	(F)	3:03

**PERSONNEL:**

A:	Blind Boy Fuller, vcl/gtr. _____	New York City, 23 July 1935
B:	Blind Boy Fuller, vcl/gtr. _____	New York City, 24 July 1935
C:	Blind Boy Fuller, vcl/gtr; Blind Gary Davis, gtr added on 6, 7, 8; Bull City Red, wbd. _____	New York City, 25 July 1935
D:	Blind Boy Fuller, vcl/gtr. _____	New York City, 26 July 1935
E:	Blind Boy Fuller, vcl/gtr. _____	New York City, 28 April 1936
F:	Blind Boy Fuller, vcl/gtr. _____	New York City, 29 April 1936

NOTE: This is the first of 6 volumes.



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COMPACT  
**disc**  
DIGITAL AUDIO

AUSTRO  
MECHANA

A A D



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